

Blumenberg: Against the Demonization of Technology

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I want to propose that Blumenberg's work on technology be read as an expression of deep skepticism against any kind of unilateralism. The term *unilateralism* can be understood here as denoting a basic feature of a worldview that has not yet given up hope of arriving at ultimate foundations and which – and I would like to focus on this aspect the most – makes the further mistake of suppressing the opposing side in any dialectic in order to preserve its own side and establish a firm support for further interpretation. This suppression of the opposing side also means that any sort of *relationality* between the two sides is either entirely effaced or it is expressed in a confused, attenuated form. This relationality and its qualities, i.e. relational properties (or, in Cassirer's terminology: functional terms and functional properties instead of substance terms and substance properties), is thereby rendered inadmissibly fragmented or even completely ignored, leading to a false dogmatism.

To look at things from only one side is blindness. In the philosophy of technology, one form of blindness is the hasty condemnation of the evil specter of technology (Heidegger, Anders, Blumenberg himself in his early writings). But an unreflective technophilia would also be narrow or blind (Kapp, Dessauer, the *common-sense* belief in the Idea of Progress).

When it comes to the topic of technology, Blumenberg is concerned not only with understanding the grounds for a proper *attitude* or *response* towards technology but also with understanding technology itself as an actual phenomenon. A similar picture emerges here, even though the conceptual structure naturally shifts. For here too I take Blumenberg's conviction about the need to overcome unilateralism and recognize bi- or plurilateralism to be an indispensable condition for an understanding of the phenomenon of technology, for a mature understanding that would be able to shed light on the network of complex relations involved in the phenomenon of technology. In various texts Blumenberg goes so far as to call this the *task* of philosophy (ST 18, 193/94, 202).

A first aim of my considerations is to argue for the theses presented above and to show how they can be found in Blumenberg's work.

It is also the case, or so it seems to me, that we have not yet brought to the fore another, complementary aspect of Blumenberg's philosophy of technology. I would argue that it is precisely this aspect, which is especially attractive to situate Blumenberg in the context of Anders - Heidegger - Sloterdijk - Blumenberg. This aspect has to do with what crosses the boundaries of what is known to us, beyond the knowable and the sayable, and which extends from the metaphysical as well as the epistemological, the linguistic, and the ethical point of view

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to the fundamental questions which never completely lose their grip on us. In my opinion, Blumenberg holds, on the one hand, an extreme, or, as an article in ZEIT¹ puts it, a ‘skeptical skepticism’, i.e., a position that can be understood as an antidote against an irrational readiness to engage in radical speculations or dogmatic apocalyptic hysteria. On the other hand, I would argue, Blumenberg is fascinated by metaphysical questions, or, to put it more modestly, he cannot and will not ignore the fact that threads of arguments from the complex force fields of the knowable reach into the realm of the speculative, and that the latter plays a noteworthy contrastive role. In my opinion, the most important points of contact with the basic theses of Anders, Sloterdijk, and Heidegger are to be found here. I will not deal with this last aspect in detail, but only raise it as a question in anticipation of further work.

False unilateralism

False unilateralism can manifest itself in various forms or expressions. A first form, often referred to by Blumenberg, shows itself in a one-sided conception of the dependence relation that obtains between the overly broad and hence vague concepts of mind (*Geist*) and technology (*Technik*). Instead of a one-sided dependence, this relation is actually one of reciprocal interaction. This interaction can be expressed in a somewhat broad outline: *technology is founded not only on motivations, on the development of ideas, on spiritual causes, but all of these are also supported precisely by technology itself. They are based on a technical-material state of reality, which serves at least in part as the material basis for the history and production of ideas.* Blumenberg summed it up in a simple formula (GT 78/79): It is not just about the mind (*Geist*), which produces technology (*Technik*), but also about technology (*Technik*), which produces mind (*Geist*). The logical structure of this formula – *not only ... but also* – is both, put negatively, vague enough and, put positively, developed enough to serve as the basis for a criticism that reveals the narrow-mindedness of theories that start from unilateral premises. As already mentioned, the first and main error of more limited or narrow-minded theories would be the neglect of the fact that technology also produces the mind rather than strictly just the other way around. According to Blumenberg, it is often overlooked that a certain factual state of material development was a necessary condition for the very origin and development of certain ideas. The invention of the elevator and the telescope can be used as illustrative examples, rendering this premise obvious. As Blumenberg (GT 74) notes, the invention of the elevator, for example, the development of vertical transportation, came about only when there were already high-rise buildings. It can be understood as the result of an attention to certain problems which came to the fore only by the prompting of specific factual circumstances (high-rise buildings) that did not exist before. Likewise, the invention and construction of the telescope is not the result of the desiderata of astronomical research, but of a new technological-material facticity arising from entirely different motivations. It is only *when* these become a given, a *fact*, and only *because* they become a given, that certain ideas can gain a foothold in technological advancement, and in some cases, such as the telescope, cause a “spiritual-historical leap” (GT 44/45).

¹ Nordhofen, Eckhard, “Zum Tode des Philosophen Hans Blumenberg”, in *DIE ZEIT*, 12. 4. 1996.

When, in the first section (ST 165-171), of his essay “Lifeworld and Technologization according to Phenomenology” (“Lebenswelt und Technisierung unter Aspekten der Phänomenologie”), Blumenberg criticizes two approaches in the philosophy of technology as too short-sighted, he means to correct not only his own earlier position, but also a fundamental shortcoming prevalent in the philosophy of technology of his day. Blumenberg takes two distinct fundamental assumptions to be false or at least too short-sighted: on the one hand, the assumption of an antithesis between nature and technology, on the other, the closely related thesis of the natural technicity of man. Both theses, I would assert, show the basic trait of a false unilateralism. It is wrong, according to Blumenberg, to conceive of technology as the arsenal of manufactured products, machinery, devices, as a “world-of-things/artifacts” (“Dingwelt”) or “universe of things/artifacts” (“Universum von Dingen”) (ST 165). The error lies in a coarse narrowing of perspective on the phenomenon of technology, since technology is seen in its artifact-character in contrast to non-artificial, natural things. Nature is conceived as the more fundamental, still unadulterated, real principle, as the basis and the forgotten *arche* of the derivative realm of an artificially produced second nature. Blumenberg notes self-critically in a footnote that this position had been defended in his earlier writings. At least as far as the valuing of the *physis*-principle is concerned, Blumenberg’s critique of this position is directed especially at Heidegger, as well as at any technophobic philosophy which takes the distance to a primordial ‘*ur*’-nature as the basis for an hostility towards the artificial. According to this first theoretical critique, what is unilateral here is an understanding of technology according to which technology plays a purely dissociating and derivative role ultimately always leading back to nature.

The second way in which this view of the phenomenon of technology is narrow-minded also has to do, albeit in a different way, with the presupposition of an antithesis between nature and technology, insofar as *techne* is conceived as a capacity for action, as man’s ability to define man via a knowledge that discloses itself in *praxis* and one which makes *techne*, as understood above, the prevailing and fundamental basis of a theoretical account of technology. It would be misguided here to look at manufacturing as the essential mark of technology and to think of the specificity of man as *homo faber* as a prior or even exclusive condition for a theory of technology. Blumenberg has Ernst Kapp particularly in mind. According to Kapp, human history can be fully explained in terms of the history of the development of better tools (ST 165). In my opinion, this is where it starts becoming difficult to understand Blumenberg’s critique. Theories in which technology is understood as a capacity of Man for technical production, in which practical forms of knowledge play a decisive role in some way or another, have appeared in very different and, in some cases, widely distinct forms during the twentieth century, so that an adequate and even strongly negative analysis of those theories cannot limit itself to attacking this simple criterion which in fact they all satisfy. I do not wish to assert here that Blumenberg himself has proceeded from the premise that this criterion was full-blooded. I wish only to be cautious, to make Blumenberg’s argument stronger than it actually is. For the theoretical focus on the elevation of practical *know-how* and the production and craft that follows from that know-how could be attributed to those anthropological theories that see humans as deficient beings (*Mängelwesen*), theories in the vein of Herder, Scheler, Gehlen, Plessner, etc., but also, in a certain sense, the theories of Anders, Heidegger, and Sloterdijk. However, the differences

between all these different theories would be lost in such a reductive view. I would like to return to this point at the end of my analysis.

As the argument progresses, an argument which Blumenberg presents in “Lifeworld and Technologization according to Phenomenology”, the two forms of false unilateralism are, so to speak, gradually revealed. For this purpose, Blumenberg relies on Husserl’s concept of lifeworld (“Lebenswelt”). Although Blumenberg distances himself from the transposition of a non-theoretical beginning into the course of history, as attempted by Husserl in several drafts of his *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, he nevertheless appreciates the synchronous meaning of the Husserlian lifeworld, the “always underlying ground layer of life differentiated by different interest gradations” (ST 177) or, in other words, the “universe of self-evidence” (ST 178) or “the inexhaustible supply of unreflective and immediate existing, intimate, and unknown precisely in this intimacy” (ST 178). What Blumenberg appreciates in the late Husserl’s understanding of the nature of philosophy, is, if I may say so, this “synchronous” lifeworld concept that is tied to the retrogressive *telos* of the disclosure *qua* clarification of self-evident truths, truths which are given to us, just because of their fundamental self-evidence, only in a non-theoretical or pre-theoretical way, and which therefore can only be made reflectively available through theoretical effort. What he rejects as a dogmatic prejudice in the late Husserl is Husserl’s obsessive focus on the thesis that the work of understanding of pre-theoretical premises in the modern age is always already on the way in the narrow course of scientific interpretation, without the modern man being aware of this. The irony in Blumenberg’s critique is that he denounces Husserl’s criticism of the unilateralism of his (Husserl’s) day, one which is unilaterally influenced by natural science, as unilateral. And that is how we arrived at Blumenberg’s own premise. Technology is not a result of an explanation of pre-theoretical certainties, which is reduced to naturalistic thought patterns and therefore both semi-consciously and semi-unconsciously explained, but technology emerges already in advance of science, i.e., in the pre-theoretical area of lifeworld experience and action. In Blumenberg’s own words: “But the sentence: *The simple experience in which the lifeworld is given is the ultimate basis for all objective knowledge*,² is the basic requirement to understand the transformation of the lifeworld into an objectworld as itself arising out of the lifeworld and not as a kind of ‘original sin’ in the form of a voluntary act of the will [the will of the natural sciences; B. S.] which can no longer be investigated.” (ST 183). The bilateralism suggested by Blumenberg consists in placing the reciprocal interplay of the pre-theoretical, the “unknown” factual given, the basic motivations and basic interests on the one hand, and the patterns of models of cognitive interpretation, which are to be found in the complex structure of personal, socio-collective, and epochal dogmatics on the other. This is the precondition for a new theoretical reflection on technology.

The willingness to admit of and engage in reciprocal perspectives – the lifeworld establishes the groundwork for theory, the theory works itself back onto the lifeworld and changes it – does not mean that one is *ipso facto* automatically protected from all unilateralism, as the example of Husserl shows. Nevertheless, for Blumenberg this willingness remains the central antidote against premature radicalisms. These radicalisms, in order to develop their dogmatics of alarm,

² Blumenberg cites this sentence from *Husserliana VI*, p. 229.

always require an inaccessible moment which, because of its inaccessibility, has a fatal impact. In Husserl, the unilateralism of a scientific reason plays the part of the unknown and inaccessible crisis factor. Blumenberg, on the other hand, appeals to an attitude, which is skeptical and sober towards every hasty dogmatization. This skepticism can be put into practice in a number of ways. Thus, it is not necessarily disastrous, but in fact quite understandable, that certain research results and discoveries need not be arrived at via a continuous effort, but rather via a crystallized, formulaic form which determines both scientific methodology and daily practice. When I turn on the light switch or use a calculator, I do not necessarily need to be able to have the theoretical knowledge behind it. But that does not necessarily mean being at the mercy of the technical methods of dealing with things, but also the opening up of a room for new and free ideas and transformations in the forcefield of practice (*praxis*), theory and method. Nor does it mean that theory would be reduced to one definite theoretical methodology, i.e., a particular practice-oriented form of theory. If every such practice-oriented form of theory is recognized and taken seriously in its interwovenness with the lifeworld, then it can also be analyzed and corrected.

The methodological aspects of this needed bilateralism would be further developed in the four years that followed the essay “Lifeworld and Technologization according to Phenomenology”, and presented in a clearer fashion in the essay “Methodological Problems of an Intellectual History of Technology” (ST 230-253 / GT 49-86). Methodology is theoretical practice (*praxis*), and, in the best case, practice, whose theoretical premises are reflectively accessible. If we are to write an intellectual history (*Geistesgeschichte*) of technology from the unilateral premise that mind is realized in the phenomena of technology, then all that remains for such history to do is ask about the source of motivation (the intellectual (*geistige*) origins) for putting the ideas into technological practice, or for providing a post factum justification or legitimization of this technological implementation of ideas. Instead Blumenberg suggests:

“that the history of facts itself presented *as* a sequence of facts, thought of in temporal terms, not only ‘*accompanies*’ the reflective formation of ideas, but consists of a system of mutually-related effects resulting of the interaction between ideas and reality. It is necessary to see how open the questions here are and also what is to be demanded of the methodology which, by contrast to its precedent, is free from the prejudice of choosing between these alternatives.” (GT 54)

According to Blumenberg, one consequence of this openness would be that the questions be asked in a “*smaller*” (GT 57) way, that is, that the interaction between theory, which is itself practice, and practice, which is theory laden, should not be hidden by assuming large scale premises which are often hastily assumed as foundational, for example, by assuming that practice is always the result of certain previous scientific methods of inquiry.

This suggestion also contains a warning, which I have indicated here with the term “*large scale* premises”. This warning, which could be interpreted as a false bilateralism, should now be briefly discussed.

Difficulties with bilateralism

In 1961, Blumenberg gave a graduation address at the Justus Liebig University in Gießen entitled "World Images and World Models" ("Weltbilder und Weltmodelle"). The title itself already points to a kind of bilateralism. Blumenberg explains at the beginning of his address how he intended to use these terms:

"I must explain these two terms. By "world model" I mean the total representation of the empirical reality as given by the state of the natural sciences and which incorporates the totality of scientific statements. By "world image," I intend to denote the whole concept of reality in which and through which man understands himself, orientates his evaluations and action goals, grasps his possibilities and necessities, and shapes himself according to his essential needs. The world image has "practical power (*praktische Kraft*)," as Kant would say." (ST 128-129)

As far as the bilateralism of world image and world model is concerned, an intact bilateralism still prevailed until the modern age, although it should be noted that the world image occupied the guiding role:

"The world image contained the meaning and, so to speak, the "instruction manual" for all conceivable world models. But this meant at the same time that no adequate understanding could be found within the world model concerning Man's knowledge in itself. Science, having lost sight of the horizon of its own foundations, was unable to be reflectively aware of what it itself was doing." (ST 129)

On this point very close to Husserl, Blumenberg asserts that "the subordination of the world model to the world image is suspended" (ST 131). Not only that, but now the world model has taken over the place of the world image and is sapping the latter of its residual substance completely (ST 131). But here Blumenberg presents a decisive argument, one which brings him into a striking contrast with Husserl. According to Blumenberg, the function of the world image was "monistic" by nature (ST 133), and what ultimately led to the disappearance of a monistic world was the emergence of a plurality of world image surrogates. This historical "disaster (*Unfall*)" (ST 131) was irrevocable and irreversible. But what made this situation even more difficult was the fact that competition between the world images (or their surrogates) had been imperceptibly dominated by interests from "more commonplace areas (*handfesteren Bereichen*)" (ST 134). According to Blumenberg, "the discovery of how world images can be misappropriated and used as ideological instruments (...) definitely discredited the representation of the world as world images and made it impossible as a philosophical task" (ST 134). It would be false bilateralism therefore, if we were not to abandon the search for a final monistic world picture, or at least not to abandon the uncritical claim to being able to produce such a picture. This accusation would also have to be made to Husserl, but it likewise serves as an argumentative basis for the rejection of all those philosophers who still thought until the 1960s that such a comprehensively monistic interpretation of our "being-in-the-world" would be achievable. Nevertheless, according to Blumenberg, this does not mean that philosophy remains entirely without a task. Philosophy has the task, in a certain way reminiscent of Adorno, of

critically reflecting on these interconnections. Furthermore, according to Blumenberg, theoretical insight into these interconnections has the positive function to make us *immune* to the unilateral temptation (cf. ST 136). A good dose of optimistic confidence lies here in the power of reason not only to resist the seduction of radical monisms, but also in its power to counter the undeniable dangers of an unreflective approach to technological development. This fundamental conviction may very well be regarded as *the* aspect in which Blumenberg distances himself most clearly from the dark, resigned philosophy of Adorno. The fact that Heidegger is to be counted among one of the main representatives of the radical monists, is something that the Blumenberg of the 1960s leaves no room for doubt, even though Blumenberg had had a quite positive attitude towards Heidegger in the 1950s.³ One of Blumenberg's clearest and most devastating critiques can be read in his 1966's book *The Legitimacy of The Modern Age*. In it, Blumenberg claims that Heidegger's "pseudo theology"

"gets its orientation from both the temporary and provisional status assigned to the age, as prior to a new and then perhaps final event in the "history of Being" – its turning to *parousia* [presence] – and the compellingly imposed, negative evaluation of the age, in which mythical rejection by the substitute for divinity, on the one hand, and the arrogance of the subjectivity that is a failure as far as 'authenticity' is concerned, on the other, make up a *single* integral state of affairs. The epoch appears as an absolute 'fact' [*Faktum*] – or better: as a 'given' [*Datum*]; it stands, sharply circumscribed, outside any logic, adapted to a state of error, and in spite of its immanent pathos of domination (or precisely on account of it) finally permits only the one attitude that is the sole option that the "history of Being" leaves open to man: submission. The absolutism of "Being" is in truth only the continuation of the medieval result by other means." (LMA 192)

The "stigmata of domination, of the serviceability of theory for technicity, of man's self-production" (*ibid.*) would be read precisely *not* as a response to an epochal challenge whose outcome is still undecided and which demands the careful vigilance of reason, but rather as the stigmata of an era of "the un-'graced' confusions surrounding the "Being" that has been withdrawn and concealed since the time of the Pre-Socratics." (*ibid.*).

Blumenberg's ambivalent philosophical pathos

Until now, I have tried – with the help of the concepts of unilateralism and bilateralism I have introduced – to show the development of a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of technology as first postulated by Blumenberg in the 1960s. Having made Blumenberg's views explicit, in the next section of my analysis I would like to evaluate this view insofar as it bears some relation to the views of Anders, Heidegger and Sloterdijk.

By entitling this section "Blumenberg's ambivalent philosophical pathos," I implicitly intend to assert the following: From the 1960s onwards, Blumenberg develops a sweeping aversion to any

³ See, in particular, "The Relationship of Nature and Technology as a Philosophical Problem" (ST 17-29), from 1951, and "Technology and Truth" (ST 42-50), from 1953. In the latter essay there are striking parallels with Heidegger's identification of the first stages of the decadent history of metaphysics.

theory that essentially espouses any sort of reductive reductionism. If one were to bring the predicate ‘fluid’ in the sense of Zygmunt Bauman’s ‘liquid’ into play here, one could also understand Blumenberg’s anti-radical plea as a strong appeal not to remetaphysicalize the fluid in a reductive manner and in a false fear of un-determinateness. Nevertheless, Blumenberg remains highly aware of the attraction, or in Heideggerian terms, of the risk (*Wagnis*), of borderline thought. These borderline thoughts appear both in positive and negative forms. One should therefore not make of borderline thought a kind of fetish. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that, like every phenomenon lying outside our horizon, the crossing of boundaries exerts a strong attraction. Curiosity (*curiositas* / *cura*)⁴, which had always – as Blumenberg masterfully shows in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* – been seen as a threat to willingly surrender to excess, reaches beyond its territorial boundaries into the realm of the insane, the *lou-cura*,⁵ especially if it carries the exciting task of taking on the inherent potential of the “technical” Creator. In short, this means that in Blumenberg there remains a dilemma between a sober and objective endeavor for the non-reduction of complexity and rationality, an anti-dogmatism and anti-ideology, on the one hand, and a preserved sensitivity for the unworkable, the incomprehensible, the unspeakable and its explosive force, on the other. I would now like to briefly present some textual evidence for this thesis, in order to ultimately draw a final and problematizing conclusion.

Sensitivity to the ‘Dangers’ of Technology

There are three weighty objections, that Blumenberg himself invokes, against his reasonably moderate maxim of philosophy as a kind of watchdog. All three arguments come from the camp of the ‘radical monists’.

The *first objection* claims the following: Technical development naturally acquires a certain momentum and tends to escape human control. This is also due to the fact that technical development does not take place solely on the basis of ‘endogenous motivations’, but is also increasingly a consequence of ‘exogenous motivations’. At first glance this seems to be a thesis that Blumenberg considered only in his early writings, writings such as “Atomic Morality – A Counterpart of the Nuclear Strategy” (“Atommal – Ein Gegenstück zur Atomstrategie”) from 1946, where we find, among other things, the statement that each power potential displays the *immanent* (and I stress *immanent* here) tendency to actualize itself *qua* potential (ST 12). Five years later, in 1951, Blumenberg is already turning against positions that “demonize” technology. Still, he nevertheless affirms as an unmistakable *fact* that technology is increasingly acquiring characteristics that are threatening to “*autonomy*”, which manifests itself in its

⁴ The close relationship between the two terms (*curiositas* and *cura*) is made explicit in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (See LdN, especially pp. 356 and 404); where Blumenberg considers *curiositas* to be a specific form of *cura*.

⁵ See LdN 363ff., where the predicate of foolish-insane joins the two other predicates of *curiositas*, excessiveness and profligacy. The wordplay, that establishes a connection between *cura* and *lou-cura*, only works in Spanish (*locura*) and Portuguese (*loucura*), and apparently also lacks a sound etymological basis. Still, it seems to me that there is some justification for the connection, in a kind of Heideggerian or Derridian manner.

“increasing unavailability for man” and in “drowning out his decisions, desires, needs through a dynamics of the object” (ST 18). This fundamental idea also appears repeatedly in later writings. In *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, it is, for example:

“But there are phases of objectivization that lose themselves from their original motivation (the science and technology of the later phases of the modern age provide a stupendous example of this!), and to bring them back into their human function, to subject them again to man’s purposes in relation to the world, requires an unavoidable counterexertion.” (LMA 177)

In “Lifeworld and Technologization according to Phenomenology”, Blumenberg speaks of a “pathology of technology,” which is, in principle, that the motivation inherent in technology is exogenous, it is “supplied from the outside,” but actually requires an endogenous motivation, which, when the day comes when there is a ‘global scale desideratum’ (“*Desiderat in Weltmaßstab*”), will have to catch up. One could argue that the last two quotations make it clear that in later writings Blumenberg minimizes the autonomy of technology and characterizes it as ultimately reflectively manageable. This is undoubtedly the case, but we are now, figuratively speaking, faced with a strong headwind brought about by a *second objection*, one which Blumenberg himself brings into question.

The *second objection* is found in a particularly pure form in Günther Anders. It expresses the concern of an ever-widening discrepancy between the possibility of reflective control, the reflective or imaginative human capacity, and the dynamic development of the productive capacity. According to Anders, the gap between the rational capacities and the development of technological products becomes unclosable. In 1946 Blumenberg had launched the thesis that “this [the growing advances in atomic technology, B.S.] means an increase, a definiteness, and even an absolute ultimateness of technological autonomy, in such a way that exceeds the possibilities of even the liveliest and most consistent imagination.” (ST 11). Yet seventeen years later, in 1963, in “Lifeworld and Technologization according to Phenomenology”, Blumenberg, following Husserl, sketches a scenario according to which the technology implanted in the lifeworld suppresses not only reasonable questioning, but also reasoned reflection and the posing of questions about meaning:

“Technologization not only tears apart the foundational context from which theoretical questions emerge in the lifeworld, but it also starts to regulate the lifeworld by leveling all distinctions between that sphere in which we do not *yet* ask questions and that in which we *no longer* ask questions, and in which the occupation of this object-space is controlled and motivated by the immanent dynamics of the technically always-already-finished (“Immer-Fertigen”), by the irrefutability of production which is identified with natural power.” (ST 190)

Although Blumenberg is encouraged by the hope that reason can overcome this relationship and the inevitability of inaccessibility, the objection as such becomes visible as a kind of negative film on which reason has to work, although the success of this work is by no means guaranteed. The situation is similar when in 1966/67 Blumenberg diagnoses part of the malaise

of his era, which is that “today we live in a scientific-technological world with a largely pre-scientific and pre-technological consciousness” (GT 28), which is because we have not yet emerged from the antithesis between nature and technology. Here, too, it is indisputable that Blumenberg hopes that this ‘emergence’ is possible, but it is not guaranteed. But Blumenberg’s diagnosis of our era is a fact, something that no doubt is true in our space.

The *third objection* offers as a thesis an idea that is particularly prominent in Anders’s work, and which Anders thinks through to its ultimate consequences. Technology becomes an enemy of Man, one that not only competes with human beings but also makes them dependent on itself. In other words, technology makes *demands* on people, even if these are basically only internalized human demands. The key point here is that Man is not able to see through this logic of internalization. This thesis can be found in its purest and clearest form in a very early text by Blumenberg, “Atomic Morality – A Counterpart of the Nuclear Strategy” 1946:

“The qualitative and quantitative progress of technological production, however, leads to the growing differentiation and ultimate separation of the planning and production processes, whereby the clear focus on predefined purposes and intentions, the full insight into the overall structure of individual production is lost. The impulses and demands no longer depend on the human and social prerequisites, but on the technical product in itself, which is strongly supported by the related autonomous structure of the economy. It overturns its servile role, turning Man into the technician, entrepreneur and worker in its (i.e. technology’s) service. Indeed, it dictates to the whole of human society the needs and the purposes which are no longer the ones which Man has given himself.” (ST 10-11)

Even in this text, Blumenberg makes it clear that despite this diagnosis of the dangers of technological progress, which had also revealed themselves to a terrible extent after the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1946, he rejected the one-sided technophobic demonization of technology (see ST 11). The insight and formulation of this idea, however, does not simply disappear with the Blumenberg of the 1960s, but rather appears again and again in work of this period. In 1957, Blumenberg observes that the physical constitution of Man “is frustratingly unable to meet” the demands imposed on it by “technical work” (ST 95). And in 1963, in “Lifeworld and Technologization according to Phenomenology”, Blumenberg tells us that the already finished product in turn *imposes* needs and meanings, for instance by “artificially creating a whole layer of fictional motives and values, which are themselves created by technical effort” (ST 190). What must be kept in mind is the fact that Blumenberg is by no means blind to those correlations that are at the center of technophobic arguments. Blumenberg does not demonize these correlations, but he notes them and shows that they are to be billed. One could also express the difference as follows: according to Blumenberg, we are not hopelessly at the mercy of these correlations (though this is hardly the case according to a philosophical technophobic), which does not mean that they do not exist. The quasi-paradoxical ambivalence of this mode of reflection lies in the fact that these correlations point at their core to something *a fortiori* uncontrollable – and the word “uncontrollable” means here that the possibility of control is simply not given nor exists – but which is nevertheless, at bottom, still controllable.

The ambivalence of this specific argument can, I think, be tied to a broader ambivalence present in Blumenbergian reflection, one already stated above: on the one hand, its sober and objective endeavor for rationality and anti-dogmatism, on the other, its sensitivity towards the uncontrollable and that which transcends reason.

Put in Positive Terms: Sensitivity towards Boundary-Crossing Utopias

I would now like to show that Blumenberg's aforementioned sensitivity towards the uncontrollable or inconceivable also presents itself in an inverted, positive form. One of Blumenberg's central theses in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, one which in other writings he explicitly ties to the phenomenon of technology, is that the dissolution of the tight connection between the "God's natural world and Man's world of work (*Werkwelt*)" and the lack of faith in God as *finis omnium naturalium* is the "basic presumption of modernity and its essential technicity" (GT 126/127). In an alternative, perhaps more precise, formulation, one can say that at the end of the Middle Ages a technological will first consciously encounters an estranged reality in order to bring about a "new humanity" through the force of technology (GT 33/34).

In many of his texts, Blumenberg now appears to affirm the ancillary thesis that man at the beginning of the modern age is now free to undertake the infinite task of self-assertion and self-definition. This becomes especially clear in "Lifeworld and Technologization according to Phenomenology", when Blumenberg adds his own voice to Husserl's critical commentary. The context is the following: In contrast to Husserl, Blumenberg advocates that we shouldn't stigmatize the mechanization (i.e. a formalization or functionalization) of knowledge as a simple deficiency (since once mechanical knowledge is attained it returns into obscurity), but as a legitimate and necessary tribute, the price that is necessary to pay, if one, like Husserl, dreams of the "*realization of the mankind of infinite tasks*" (ST 194). Methodization, according to Blumenberg, is enforced by the fact that science in the modern age understands itself as an entity that embodies the "infinite claim[s] of a finite being". *Curiositas*, formerly condemned as the greatest evil, is now freed from any dogmatic shackles and is thus able to take up defiantly the gulf between infinity and finitude. This is a hallmark of the new, modern technicity (*Technizität*), which sees *lou-cura* (madness), as a limit case of *cura / curiositas*, as an exciting attraction rather than as a mortal sin. In this way, Man is freed to engage in the limitless exploration both of his own potential and of nature. With Francis Bacon, Blumenberg tells, we see the task of "leading the human spirit from what *is* to what *can be*" raised "to the task of historical reflection" *par excellence* (GT 60). This liberation oriented towards the realization of one's own possibilities is closely linked to Blumenberg's understanding of philosophy and technology. As Blumenberg tells us at the beginning of "World Images and World Models", the usefulness of philosophy in history can be summed up in *one* basic formula: "Philosophy is Man's nascent awareness (*Bewusstsein*) of himself" (ST 127), and this awareness is the more complete, the more capable it becomes to realize all human possibilities. But it is not simply a matter of theoretical self-assurance, but also an active implementation in practice. Man, as Blumenberg had already stressed in 1953, is not only the being which produces technological structures, but rather "a being that realizes himself technologically, and whose "truth" is fundamentally

technological” (ST 49). The publishers of *Intellectual History of Technology*, Alexander Schmitz and Bernd Stiegler, stress in the book’s epilogue, entitled “Editorial Note”, that this insight into the nature of human beings as auto-technological beings *still* or even *especially* applies to Blumenberg after he had turned towards a moderate anti-demonization stance regarding technology. This is because this insight does nothing but draw out the consequences from the bilateral interaction between mind and technology, theory and practice, which is the foundation for Blumenberg’s critique of false unilateralism (cf. ST 140/141).

But the fact is, while connecting the auto-technological nature of Man to the still unexhausted, unrecognized and uncontrolled not-yet (“*Noch-Nicht*”), the reflection on bilateralism as fundamental is nevertheless insufficient to wipe the table clean from both the charms and dangers of this not-yet. That Blumenberg too repeatedly shows himself to be open to the appeal of the speculative and the unanswerable questions, is visible not only at certain stages of his thinking, but is indeed a basic feature of his work. A good example of this is the rather early essay entitled “‘Imitation of Nature’: Toward a Prehistory of Creative Man” (“‘*Nachahmung der Natur*’ – Zur Vorgeschichte des schöpferischen Menschen”), which culminates in the speculative thesis that particularly in the originating-creative acts of art – and one may very well add the closely related technological creativity – one comes to an ascertainment of the potential of Being, which ultimately becomes a path in which the eternally existent is manifested and revealed in the totality of its possibilities, including its contingencies. Man, and especially the artistic man, as a vehicle for the disclosure of cosmological and ideal potentialities – that is, according to Blumenberg, an idea that underlies the thought of great philosophers like Kant and Leibniz, and great artists such as Paul Klee, an idea whose appeal is quite rationally grounded. It is in my view no contingency, but perhaps a sign of his time, that Blumenberg ultimately assigns to art the role of being a replacement for metaphysics. In the aforementioned article, art is called a “metaphysical activity,” namely one that is not committed to any specific dogma, although this thesis can itself be charged with being dogmatic on a meta level. Closely related to this issue are Blumenberg’s later works on metaphorology, and this not just because it is there that Blumenberg calls “the loss of metaphysics” a “putting the metaphorical back in its place” (AEMS 144). Rather, the concept of metaphorology in Blumenberg is based on the question of whether the seemingly infinite number of combinations and recombinations of metaphors is a kind of exhaustion of a predefined boundary of potentialities or whether it leaves room for the idea that something completely new could arise from this predetermined material. This question seems to get lost not only in the realm of metaphysical speculation, but it also seems to motivate, in various ways, some of the major technophobic ideas such as those of Heidegger or Derrida. I cannot investigate this question further, but I would now like, in conclusion, to offer some questions and problems that may arise from the analysis I presented.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis I have presented thus far should, as I have expressed above, show that there is an “ambivalent philosophical pathos” underlying Blumenberg’s philosophy. On the one hand, Blumenberg understands, especially from the 60s on, when he embraces anti-demonization and

begins to trust in the power of reflective reason, that the bilateral interaction of practice and theory is of the utmost importance, especially for an ethical assessment of technological progress. This ethic is therefore fluid (or ‘liquid’, using the term introduced by Bauman) because it has to decide on a case-by-case basis, because it has to resort to specific contexts and because it lacks a general and universal metaphysical foundation *qua* worldview. It would be wrong to interpret this shortcoming as a demonic *fatum* and so to declare a priori that the enlightening function of reason is bankrupt.

On the other hand, Blumenberg’s option to defend anti-demonization does not imply that he denies the existence of the crucial conditions that the “demonologists” point to. That technological advances can escape the control of people, that they are placed at a distance that can hardly be bridged by the human imagination and feeling, that technical objects can present themselves to Man with their own paraethical demands, all of that is stated by Blumenberg, though all of it is seen through the lens of a “hope and trust in reason.” Ethical demands for reasonable control, when they take in account real dangers, are fluid because they are located in a boundary area in which the ethical is at risk of saying something only to the most enlightened, while the general public no longer understands the crucial point.

As to Blumenberg’s subdued fascination with the full exploitation of human and possibly natural potentialities, there seems to be an understandable sympathy for what Blumenberg himself has worked out as the fundus and engine of modern *curiositas*: the freedom to pursue these without a bad conscience, even if their opponents continue to peddle the negative anti-image, that of *curiositas* which slides into madness – *lou-cura*. I conclude here with a metaphor: The ethics would be fluid here because it dares to enter the ‘slippery’ terrain of what, due to its indeterminacy and inaccessibility, eludes a sound ethical debate.

The fundamental question that pervades most demonological discourses on technology, is whether man has the capacity to meet the requirements of technological development, or, in other words, whether he lags so hopelessly behind technological development that he can only remediate his increasing inferiority by applying his technological *know how* to himself as a species, with the result that he would in fact become something other than what he is. This is a concern Blumenberg cannot really defuse.

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Translated by Luís Manuel Pinto de Sá